

MEMO: The Scope of Military Suicides

Epidemic of Military Suicides

- Since 2001, approximately 2,300 soldiers have died in Operation Enduring Freedom. Over the same period, more than 3,000 active duty soldiers have taken their own lives.ⁱ
- More than 1.5 times more active duty soldiers have died as a result of suicide than died in Operation Enduring Freedom so far this year.ⁱⁱ
- The number of active duty suicides peaked in 2012 with 320 active duty servicemembers² taking their own lives, which surpasses the number of soldiers killed in Operations Enduring Freedom, Operation New Dawn, and Operation Iraqi Freedom that year. When including reserve component service members, the number of suicides rises to 522.ⁱⁱⁱ

Deaths in Combat vs. Active Duty Suicides
2001 - 2013

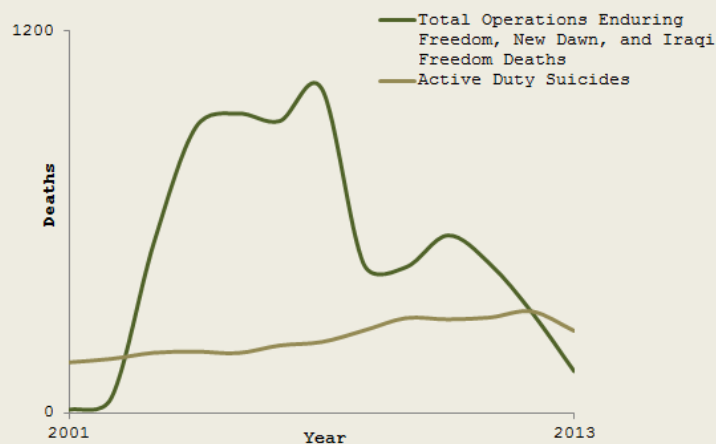


Figure 2 Source: Department of Defense

Deaths in Operation Enduring Freedom vs. Active Duty Suicides
2001 - 2013

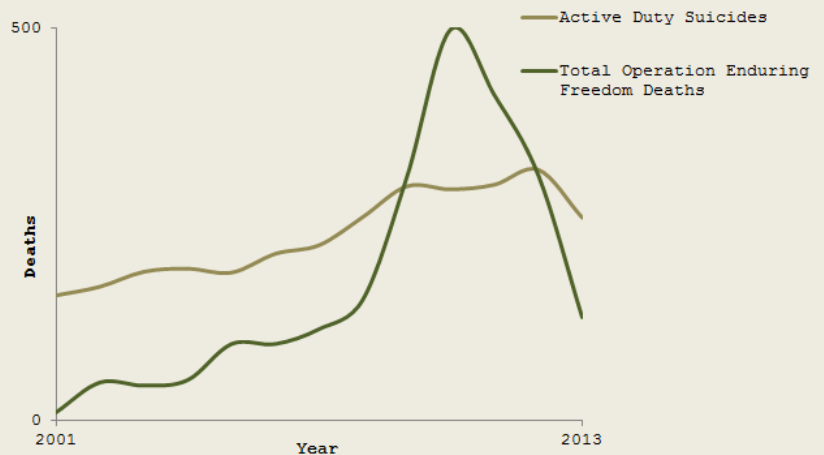


Figure 1 Source: Department of Defense

Active Duty Military Branches

- The Army active duty has the majority of suicide deaths with over 1,500 suicides from 2001 to the first quarter of 2014.^{iv}
- From 2001 – 2011, Army active duty suicides more than tripled.
- The Navy, Air Force, and Marines active duty had approximately 570, 600, and 460 suicide deaths from 2001 to the first quarter of 2014, respectively.
- Traditionally, the military has a lower rate of suicide than the general civilian population. In 2004, this trend reversed. At the highest level of military suicides in 2012, the active duty suicide rate almost doubled the civilian suicide rate.^v

¹ Beginning in 2012, the Department of Defense updated the method in which it counted military suicides. Previously, all servicemembers in active duty roles, even if the servicemember was part of a Reserve or National Guard component, was counted as active duty. For 2012 and 2013, active duty and reserve servicemembers were separated, making the numbers slightly lower.

² Updated number from the *Department of Defense Quarterly Suicide Report Calendar Year 1st Quarter, Quarter 1 2014, 2*;

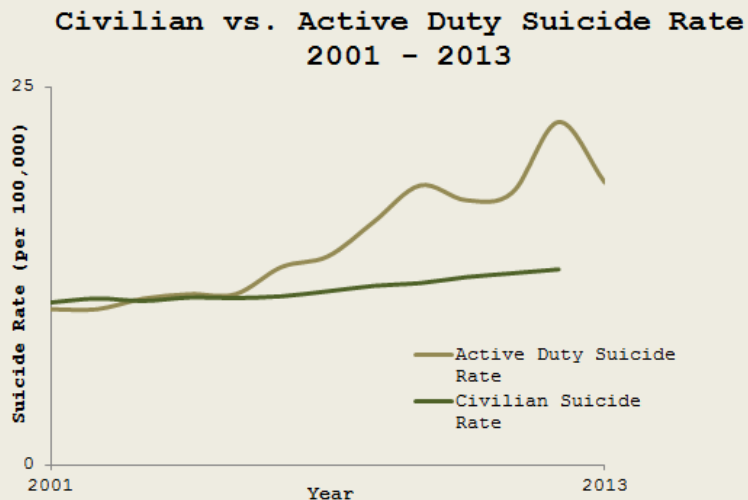


Figure 3 Source: Center for Disease Control, Department of Defense

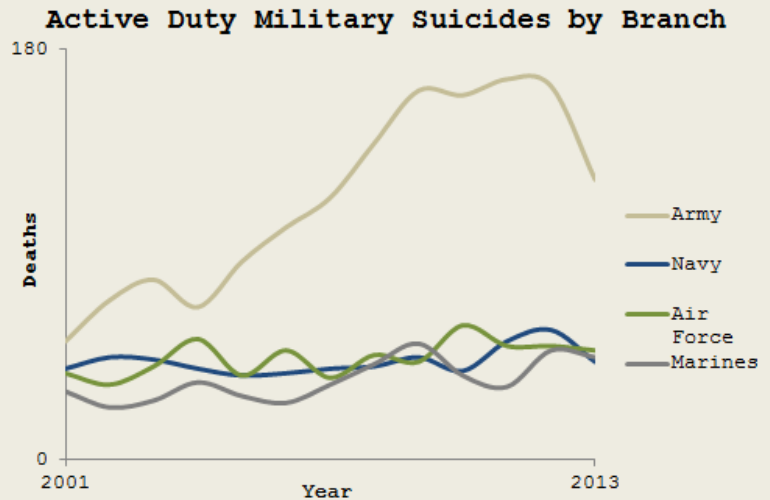


Figure 4 Source: Department of Defense

National Guard

- Suicides in the National Guard have risen more than in any other branch in the past five years.^{vi}
- From 2012, when the Department of Defense began to count National Guard suicides independently from other branches, the National Guard had the second-highest number of suicides.
- In 2013, 120 National Guard soldiers took their own lives, almost the same as the Army.

The Sexton Act

Senator Donnelly has worked tirelessly through his position on the Senate Armed Services Committee to help bring attention to the issue of military suicide and to pass legislation to help end the scourge of military suicide. On May 7, 2014, Donnelly reintroduced the *Jacob Sexton Military Suicide Prevention Act*, which will come up for a vote as part of the Fiscal Year 2015 National Defense Authorization Act this year.

The bill would:

- **Require annual mental health assessments for all servicemembers—Active, Reserve, and Guard.** Right now, the best and most consistent screening is happening only for those within the deployment cycle which can leave non-deployed members of the Active, Reserve, and Guard components underserved.
- **Maintain strong privacy protections for servicemembers.** We must ensure that seeking help remains a sign of strength by protecting the privacy of the servicemember coming forward. The privacy of servicemembers would be ensured by guaranteeing medical privacy protections for these mental health assessments.
- **Require an interagency report to evaluate existing military mental health practices and provide recommendations for improvement.** This report, which is due to Congress within a year of enactment of the bill, would help identify which programs are working and which need to be fixed. A specific focus of the report will be identifying successful peer-to-peer programs that address the need for a more bottom-up approach to identifying warning signs and combatting stigma in each of the Services, with the intention of future expansion.

Resources

If you or a loved one is in need of assistance, call the **Military Crisis Line** at **1-800-273-8255** and **press 1**, or go to MilitaryCrisisLine.net or **text 838255** for a confidential chat.

ⁱ **Suicide statistics:** Defense Suicide Prevention Office. 2014. *Department of Defense Quarterly Suicide Report Calendar Year 2014 1st Quarter*, Quarter 1, 2; Defense Suicide Prevention Office. 2014. *Department of Defense Quarterly Suicide Report Calendar Year 2013 4th Quarter*, July, 2; Department of Defense. 2013. *Department of Defense Suicide Event Report Calendar Year 2012 Annual Report*, December, 109, 135, 161, 187; Department of Defense. 2012. *Department of Defense Suicide Event Report Calendar Year 2011 Annual Report*, November, 93, 128, 171, 206; Acosta, Joie, Rachel M. Burns, Lisa H. Jaycox, Christopher G. Pernin, and Rajeev Ramchand. 2011. *The War Within: Preventing Suicide in the U.S. Military*. Santa Monica: RAND, 10. **Military Casualties statistics:** Defense Casualty Analysis System. 2014. "U.S. Military Casualties –Operation Enduring Freedom Casualty Summary by Month." Last modified November 17, 2014.

https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/dcas/pages/report_oef_month.xhtml; Defense Casualty Analysis System. 2014. "U.S. Military Casualties –Operation New Dawn Casualty Summary by Month." Last modified November 17, 2014.

https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/dcas/pages/report_ond_month.xhtml; Defense Casualty Analysis System. 2014. "U.S. Military Casualties –Operation Iraqi Freedom Casualty Summary by Month." Last modified November 17, 2014.

https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/dcas/pages/report_oif_month.xhtml

ⁱⁱ **Suicide statistics:** Defense Suicide Prevention Office 2014, 2. **Military Casualties statistics:** Defense Casualty Analysis System 2014, "U.S. Military Casualties –Operation Enduring Freedom Casualty Summary by Month"; Defense Casualty Analysis System 2014, "U.S. Military Casualties –Operation New Dawn Casualty Summary by Month"; Defense Casualty Analysis System 2014, "U.S. Military Casualties –Operation Iraqi Freedom Casualty Summary by Month."

ⁱⁱⁱ **Suicide statistics:** Defense Suicide Prevention Office. 2014. *Department of Defense Quarterly Suicide Report Calendar Year 2014 1st Quarter*, Quarter 1, 2; Defense Suicide Prevention Office. 2014. *Department of Defense Quarterly Suicide Report Calendar Year 2013 4th Quarter*, July, 2; Department of Defense. 2013. *Department of Defense Suicide Event Report Calendar Year 2012 Annual Report*, December, 109, 135, 161, 187; Department of Defense. 2012. *Department of Defense Suicide Event Report Calendar Year 2011 Annual Report*, November, 93, 128, 171, 206; Acosta, Joie, Rachel M. Burns, Lisa H. Jaycox, Christopher G. Pernin, and Rajeev Ramchand. 2011. *The War Within: Preventing Suicide in the U.S. Military*. Santa Monica: RAND, 10; "DoD Releases 2012 Annual Report on Suicide." 2012. *Department of Defense*, April 25.

<http://www.defense.gov/Releases/Release.aspx?ReleaseID=16663>. **Military Casualties statistics:** Defense Casualty Analysis System. 2014. "U.S. Military Casualties –Operation Enduring Freedom Casualty Summary by Month." Last modified November 17, 2014. https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/dcas/pages/report_oef_month.xhtml; Defense Casualty Analysis System. 2014. "U.S. Military Casualties –Operation New Dawn Casualty Summary by Month." Last modified November 17, 2014.

https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/dcas/pages/report_ond_month.xhtml; Defense Casualty Analysis System. 2014. "U.S. Military Casualties –Operation Iraqi Freedom Casualty Summary by Month." Last modified November 17, 2014.

https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/dcas/pages/report_oif_month.xhtml

^{iv} United States Army. 2010. *Army Health Promotion Risk Reduction Suicide Prevention Report 2010*. 16.

<http://csf2.army.mil/downloads/HP-RR-SPReport2010.pdf>; **Suicide statistics:** Defense Suicide Prevention Office. 2014. *Department of Defense Quarterly Suicide Report Calendar Year 2014 1st Quarter*, Quarter 1, 2; Defense Suicide Prevention Office. 2014. *Department of Defense Quarterly Suicide Report Calendar Year 2013 4th Quarter*, July, 2; Department of Defense. 2013. *Department of Defense Suicide Event Report Calendar Year 2012 Annual Report*, December, 109, 135, 161, 187; Department of Defense. 2012. *Department of Defense Suicide Event Report Calendar Year 2011 Annual Report*, November, 93, 128, 171, 206; Acosta, Joie, Rachel M. Burns, Lisa H. Jaycox, Christopher G. Pernin, and Rajeev Ramchand. 2011. *The War Within: Preventing Suicide in the U.S. Military*. Santa Monica: RAND, 10.

^v Center for Disease Control Fatal Injury Reports. "2001 – 2012, United States Suicide Injury Deaths and Rates per 100,000."

http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal_injury_reports.html; United States Army. 2010. *Army Health Promotion Risk Reduction Suicide Prevention Report 2010*. 14. <http://csf2.army.mil/downloads/HP-RR-SPReport2010.pdf>; **Suicide statistics:** Defense Suicide Prevention Office. 2014. *Department of Defense Quarterly Suicide Report Calendar Year 2014 1st Quarter*, Quarter 1, 2; Defense Suicide Prevention Office. 2014. *Department of Defense Quarterly Suicide Report Calendar Year 2013 4th Quarter*, July, 2; Department of Defense. 2013. *Department of Defense Suicide Event Report Calendar Year 2012 Annual Report*, December, 109, 135, 161, 187; Department of Defense. 2012. *Department of Defense Suicide Event Report Calendar Year 2011 Annual Report*, November, 93, 128, 171, 206; Acosta, Joie, Rachel M. Burns, Lisa H. Jaycox, Christopher G. Pernin, and Rajeev Ramchand. 2011. *The War Within: Preventing Suicide in the U.S. Military*. Santa Monica: RAND, 10.

^{vi} Griffith, James. 2012. "Suicide in the Army National Guard: What is Known for Practice Prevention, Theory, and Future Research." Presentation, June. [http://www.dcoe.mil/content/Navigation/Documents/SPC2012/2012SPC-Griffith-Suicide in the Army National Guard.pdf](http://www.dcoe.mil/content/Navigation/Documents/SPC2012/2012SPC-Griffith-Suicide%20in%20the%20Army%20National%20Guard.pdf); Defense Suicide Prevention Office. 2014. *Department of Defense Quarterly Suicide*

Report Calendar Year 2014 1st Quarter, Quarter 1, 2; Defense Suicide Prevention Office. 2014. *Department of Defense Quarterly Suicide Report Calendar Year 2013 4th Quarter*, July, 2; Department of Defense. 2013. *Department of Defense Suicide Event Report Calendar Year 2012 Annual Report*, December, 109, 135, 161, 187; Department of Defense. 2012. *Department of Defense Suicide Event Report Calendar Year 2011 Annual Report*, November, 93, 128, 171, 206; Acosta, Joie, Rachel M. Burns, Lisa H. Jaycox, Christopher G. Pernin, and Rajeev Ramchand. 2011. *The War Within: Preventing Suicide in the U.S. Military*. Santa Monica: RAND, 10.